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## V CORPS' 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT FUTURE OF SAMARRA

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**SAMARRA, Iraq** — Until two months ago, this moribund city was being held hostage by insurgents. But V Corps' 1st Infantry Division and Iraqi National Guard troops forced out the rebels.



SPC ISMAIL TURAY JR.

Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment of V Corps' 1st Infantry Division patrol Samarra Dec. 10. While the patrols and attacks by insurgents continue, division officials say there are indications that the city they wrested from anti-Iraqi forces two months ago has a bright future.

Now Samarra, a once-thriving holy city of some 200,000 people, is in the early stages of a massive facelift. Coalition forces have spent millions of dollars repairing its infrastructure. Millions more will be spent on other major projects in the coming months in hopes of making Samarra a hub for tourism in the future, one official said optimistically.

There are plans to build or repair sewage systems, schools, government buildings, streetlights, bridges and more. Additionally, the 1st Infantry Division is paying attention to even the seemingly small details that can mean a lot to citizens here, such as recently repairing the door at the main entrance of the famous Golden

Mosque. Rebels damaged the door during the clash between the insurgents and coalition forces.

While rebuilding the city, the coalition is simultaneously breathing life into Samarra's sour economy by employing locals to refurbish their own city.

Samarra is not without its challenges. But driving through the heart of the city, which has an open market that stretches several miles, one gets the sense that life is passable and the citizens are working to return to normalcy.

In the market, people openly conducted business and carried on conversations while a sermon reverberated from the Golden Mosque's loudspeakers.

Despite the progress, security is still an issue. Insurgents continually attempt to re-enter the city and frequently launch attacks against American and Iraqi forces and impede the rebuilding process.

As a result, security is at its highest level here. There are checkpoints at various entrances to the city. Soldiers search cars and drivers before allowing people to enter, and a curfew is in place.

Additionally, coalition troops conduct raids and patrol the city 24 hours a day, looking for insurgents and weapons caches. Sometimes American troops take sniper fire. They always shoot back.

Insurgents frequently fire rockets and mortars onto Patrol Base Uvanni, which houses two companies of the division's Task Force 1st Battalion, 26 Infantry. The

Americans opened the base, which used to be a school, during Operation Baton Rouge, the major offensive that wrested control of the city from rebels in October.

Patrols of the city give Soldiers an opportunity to interact with its people. Bravo Company's 3rd platoon did just that during a patrol December 16. Like many of the patrols, the unit's mission was to show that they have a presence in the area, said Staff Sgt. Vicente Mariscal.

During the patrol, the troops greeted people and handed out candy, clothes and school supplies to children. Many people were grateful.

But in addition to their displays of goodwill, the Soldiers remained focused on their mission, searching homes and cars for weapons and other contraband. Mariscal and his troops asked permission before entering homes, and in most cases, the people were cooperative.

Attitudes here toward the Americans have changed tremendously in recent months, Mariscal said.

Samarra's citizens are more cooperative with coalition forces, and Mariscal said now they may even offer information about insurgents and weapons caches in the area.

"Before, we used to ask if there was anything going on around here, and no one would answer," he said. "Now, it's gotten to the point where we would ask if they have weapons and they would bring it out to us or they show us where it's at."

